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Jackson says he'll try to free U.S. captives in Lebanon

NEW YORK (AP) — The Rev. Jesse L. Jackson said yesterday he would try to seek the release of three Americans believed to have been kidnapped in Lebanon, if he could determine who is holding the captives.

Mr. Jackson said he was willing to go to Lebanon to seek their release "as soon as it is feasible."

Before any such mission can take place, he must first determine who has custody of the three Americans, who vanished last March and May.

"If we can find people who make a difference, we will appeal to them to set the captives free," Mr. Jackson said at a news conference before his departure for Rome, where he is to meet with Pope John Paul II.

"I have reason to believe that the mission is morally the right thing to do and practically it is feasible," he said.

Mr. Jackson succeeded a year ago in persuading the Syrian government to release Lt. Robert Goodman, a Navy pilot who had been shot down.

Jerry Levin, 51, Beirut bureau chief for the Cable News Network, vanished there in March, and officials believe he was abducted.

Mr. Levin's wife, Lucille, who accompanied Mr. Jackson at the news conference, had asked Mr. Jackson

to intervene on behalf of her husband. She said she had heard indirectly that her husband was alive.

"With God, anything is possible," she said, and referred to Mr. Jackson as "a priest of God."

Mr. Jackson said he was also willing to work on behalf of two other Americans captured by Lebanese Shiite Muslims: William Buckley, 55, a political officer with the U.S. Embassy in Beirut who was abducted at gunpoint March 16, and the Rev. Benjamin Weir, 60, a Presbyterian minister who was seized May 8.

Mr. Jackson said he did not believe that the fact that he is no longer a candidate for president, as he was when he went to Syria last year, would make a difference in any mission. He goes, he said, as "a minister of the gospel."

"I remain convinced that if we can talk to people, we can convince them to choose peace over war," and convince them to make "a signal for peace, a signal for dialogue," Mr. Jackson said.